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ABSTRACT

Experiences from the author's education in teaching, dating from 1949 through the acquisition of his ED.d. degree, are the subject of this paper. Included are a model for reading instruction at the elementary school level, a review of problems of teaching English as a second language to seventh-grade students in Jordan, and a list of the major ideas gleaned from a graduate course entitled "Reading and the Pupil." The paper presents the author's experiences as an elementary school principal and as a university professor with graduate students who were classroom teachers. Mentioned are the initial teaching alphabet (ITA) introduced into America from Great Britain during the mid to late 1960s and its short span of use, programs of instruction using linguistic procedures in teaching reading, the patterns approach in reading instruction, and the teaching trend in programmed reading. A brief history of reading instruction is offered in the paper along with a mention of the popularity of basal reading approaches, whole language reading instruction in a literature based curriculum, language experience charts, and individualized reading programs. (Contains four references.) (CR)

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Marlow Edger

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MY EXPERIENCES IN THE TEACHING OF READING

I began my undergraduate experiences in teacher education in the Fall of 1949 in working on a sixty hour teaching certificate at Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas. Two years of undergraduate work with the necessary courses gave the neophyte a license to teach in the elementary school. During the 1949 Fall quarter, I took Teaching of Reading in the Elementary School; I have detailed notes kept on every class taken from 1949 through the ED.D. degree.

The instructor of Teaching Reading in the Elementary School presented a model for instruction that was based on her thinking. The model followed these flexible steps of teaching reading:

1. build background information within pupils for reading content in the new selection to be read. This was to be done through the teacher discussing with pupils related pictures in the text from which pupils would read a specific selection.

2. assist pupils to see the new words on the chalkboard, neatly printed in manuscript letters. Go over the words with pupils until they have been mastered.

4. have pupils use each new word listed on the chalkboard in a sentence. Pupils should attach meaning to the new words as they are used in context in the reading selection to be read orally or silently by pupils.

5. provide pupil/ teacher purposes or questions in which pupils read to find answers.

6. pronounce needed words to pupils as they read content silently.

7. have a followup in which pupils reapond to the stated purposes or questions which have been raised.

I must say the above model in teaching reading to pupils has many merits. The model could become quite formal if these are perceived to be rigid steps of teaching. However, if the steps are flexible, they posses considerable merit for beginning and experienced teachers to

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use. I would recommend step number two changed in which pupils would see an entire sentence containing each new word in print rather than individual words being introduced to pupils. Also, pupils should be assisted to make discoveries pertaining to the set of new words being introduced such as which words begin alike, which end alike, among other questions involving phonics. One has to be very careful as a teacher to not go overboard on the teaching of phonics. Toward the other end of the continuum, the teacher needs to teach pupils ways of unlocking new words. One method for pupils is to associate sounds with symbols as needed. Another way would be to have a systematic sequential workbook for pupils to learn phonics in depth. My thinking is phonics should be taught as needed. Pupils reveal needs as they read orally, in particular. They might also reveal needs as they ask to have selected words pronounced to them as silent reading is encountered.

The instructor of the course Teaching of Reading in the Elementary School recommended strongly that pupils in a classroom be divided into three groups; each group would be as homogeneous as possible in reading instruction.

Teaching Seventh Grade Pupils Abroad

When teaching seventh graders at Friends Boys School, Ramallah, West Bank of the Jordan during the 1953-54 school year, I stressed comprehension solely with very little emphasis placed upon word attack skills. Thus learners with instructor guidance revealed what had been comprehended through interaction with others in the classroom setting. Questions for the discussions emphasized use of ideas learned, critical and creative thinking, as well as problem solving. Many teachers have asked me if primary grade phonics should not have been taught these seventh graders. The answer would be "no" since each pupil seemingly comprehended well what was written in the printed materials. I did introduce selected new words prior to pupils reading the assigned lesson. These were printed on the chalkboard with pupils pronouncing each word with my guidance as well as using each listed word in a

sentence. Problems in teaching English such as reading in a second language were the following;

1. most Arab pupils had an accent which was added to English pronunciation of words. Modeling by the instructor seemingly worked best in helping learners with problems in pronunciation. Modeling does not single out pupils who need more assistance than others.

2. several had difficulties reading in thought units. This hindered learners in understanding or attaching meaning to what was read. However, I must say that as pupils kept reading content, increased understanding was involved in ideas read. I believe their ability to predict what would come sequentially in ideas read had much to do with comprehending since improved comprehension occurred through reading of larger units of subject matter.

3. confusion in word meanings can and does definitely occur. In one lesson we were discussing manioc, a crop grown in South America. To my disapproval, pupils always laughed out loud when the word "manioc" was pronounced. During class time, I did not see why the disturbing laughter came each time "manioc" was said. After class, a boy came to the front of the room and quietly said that in Arabic, "manioc" refers to an immoral person.

When I started in first grade during the 1934- 35 school year my knowledge of English was zero. I knew high and low German only. One day early in the school year, the teacher asked pupils if we made our beds. I said, "No I didn't." I thought the teacher meant building the bed. I was appalled when the teacher said to me, You probably do put on the sheet on the bed. I again said that I did not do that. In low German the word 'sheet' meant body excrements. I am always aware of how the same words pronounced alike differ in meaning from one language to the next. Through immersion in English in first grade, I learned the language rapidly so that by the beginning of the second semester, I was pronouncing words to others who had difficulty in reading.

4. pupils at Friends Boys School tended to speak Arabic among themselves, whereas speaking English would have helped increase

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speaking proficiency in the latter language. All subject matter areas were taught in English, except the course "Arabic." I regret I was not placed in a situation where I had to learn to speak Arabic largely. In two years on the West Bank, my Arabic did not become proficient enough to carry on a somewhat fluent conversation. It was too convenient speaking English with others in the Middle East.

Graduate Course Work in Reading

When I took a graduate course in the Reading and the Pupil at Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia, in the summer of 1960, the instructor basically stressed the same model as that presented in The Teaching of Reading course in 1949. However, more stress was placed upon the whole word since context clues were emphasized much to assist pupils to identify unknown words. If a learner did not know a word in reading, he/ she was to use the other words in the sentence to ascertain the unknown. I cannot say here that phonics was being minimized since initial consonants and their related sounds plus context clues generally gave away what the unknown word was, according to the instructor.

An interesting approach in teaching Reading and the Pupil, summer of 1960, was emphasized by the instructor. There was no basal textbook for the course. Instead, there were approximately fifteen teaching of reading texts on a stand in a reference room. College students took notes on all content read and indicated the sources. Those students who were not diligent in reading and taking notes on their own time revealed their lack of effort during class time. Here, the instructor used an inductive procedure only, in teaching. Each instructional day covered topic such as the use of context clues for one session. She would ask, "What did you read on using context clues and give the source of information obtained." This question was raised sequentially of all students in the class at random for a single session. No one knew when he/she was to respond next. Another rule was not to duplicate on what another student had said. It kept every student on his/ her toes.

Each student had to cross out from his/her notes as to what had already been said by a student in class. This meant that any student had to do much reading and note taking from the fifteen reference sources on the stand in the specially designated reference room. The instructor mentioned if a statement had been said previously in the class session, since no duplication was allowed. The instructor marked down in the grade book if the student responded to her question. If a student had run out of copied down ideas in teaching reading from a reference source, this was easily revealed in class. The writer found this method of teaching to reflect higher levels of cognition due to the following factors:

1. one had to listen very carefully during class discussion to take notes on what had been said and not repeat that idea. This meant making a checkmark or lightly crossing out in one's own notes as to what had been said by another student.

2. as one listened to the discussion, the next unmentioned teaching of reading idea needed to be in the offing. Thus the student could be called upon in sequence to respond to "What did you read about the use of context clues in the teaching of reading?"

3. there were students who had spent much time in reading from the fifteen reference sources on the reference stand and yet were called upon last to respond for that day of class. These students found that every idea had been mentioned they had recorded in their note. No doubt, the instructor was aware of this, but it did stick out as a sore thumb if no new ideas in the teaching of reading were presented for that class session.

4. Each student needed to dig out the ideas himself/ herself when reading independently in the reference room outside of class time.

5. Every student mentioned that he/she had never had to work harder in a class. Also students agreed that they learned more from this method of instruction as compared to other approaches.

What were selected major ideas gleaned from the class Reading and the Pupil?

1. tachistoscopes were recommended to speed up the act of reading. Pupils were to be trained to increase their reading speed with the use of a tachistoscope which fitted on to a slide projector. A certain number of words or letters were flashed on a screen at a specific speed. The viewer was to say what appeared on the screen. If correct, the pupil or small group viewed the next set of symbols at a slightly higher rate of speed.

2. meaning theory in learning was stressed strongly. Pupils were to attach meaning to what was read. Learners were to use and apply what had been read. Analysis of subject mater was important such as separating facts from opinions, fantasy from reality, and accurate from inaccurate statements. Synthesis was strongly emphasized in that learners were to put content together in unique ways after dividing it such as in analysis. Pupils also were to evaluate what had been understood from reading. Relevant from irrelevant content, for example, indicated that criteria had been used to evaluate subject matter.

3. phonics received much attention in the teaching of reading. However, phonics was not taught for the sake of doing so or to assist pupils to know more phonics, but rather to guide learners to increase reading abilities.

4. individualized reading became increasingly important. Here, the pupil selected a trade book to read, from among others. After completing its reading, the learner had a conference with the classroom teacher of reading. Here, the learner was evaluated in terms of comprehending the related subject matter read as well as skills achieved by reading orally self selected content in the library book.

5. unit teaching received considerable emphasis whereby teachers developed units of study emphasizing a theme, such as "Adventure Stories." The unit stressed more than the objectives section as well as the evaluation procedures to be used in teaching and learning in reading instruction. A very detailed list of annotated learning opportunities were in the unit. The listing included titles of other adventure stories in trade book form for pupils to read, additional titles of books to read by the

same author as that of the basal being used in class, audio- visual materials related to the unit, dramatic activities, construction experiences, art endeavors, and oral communication opportunities for pupils in heterogeneously grouped classrooms. Activities and experiences adjusted to pupils of diverse achievement levels were in the unit of study. Whole word/language experiences were emphasized as was definitely true of individualized reading approaches. There were teachers in the graduate course The Pupil and Reading who were opposed to the whole word/language method of reading instruction due to a deemphasis in their public school days in phonics instruction. They felt that a lack of phonics had hindered them to achieve as well as possible in reading content. The whole language versus phonics methods of instruction is still in vogue today.

Being an Elementary School Principal

Experiences as an elementary school principal, 1957-1961, brought to my attention the diversity of approaches used by teachers I supervised in reading instruction. Among others, the following were used by individual teachers: strict adherence to the basal reader with sequential lessons in phonics, language experience approach (a whole language experience for early primary age pupils) along with a basal reader/ workbook approach, and individualized reading along with the basal reader (the former being a whole language procedure of teaching). There seemingly was no clear cut philosophy of teaching reading by teachers when I served as elementary school principal from 1957- 1961.

Reading Instruction and the University Professor

As a university professor, starting in 1962, I experienced diversity of approaches used in the teaching of reading by my graduate students who were on the firing lines in classroom teaching: individualized reading in part together with the basal reader, a strong phonics method together with the basal textbook, multiple series readers, and

supplementary readers along with the basal, taught in a related form not as isolated books in reading instruction. The diversity can be noticed with individualized reading (whole language method) as compared to a strong phonics curriculum (sound-symbol relationships).

Teachers using a basal series tended to introduce a reading selection by having pupils view the new words to be read on the chalkboard, using these words in sentences or determining the meaning of each, assisting pupils to achieve a purpose or reasons for reading, and guiding learners through followup activities. Illustrations in the basal reader were used to develop background information within pupils, prior to silent or oral reading of the selection.

Graduate students in my classes who were classroom teachers tended to emphasize the following when using individualized reading in teaching pupils: having a large available selection of library books for pupils at a learning center; introducing a few books to whet learners appetites for choosing and reading a library book, developing a bulletin board display on interesting library books for pupils to select from and read, helping a pupil to choose a book if none appeared to be appealing, placing library books at the center which are on different reading levels as well as diverse topics so that each learner may choose that which is interesting and harmonizing with present reading levels of achievement, and encouraging the pupil to read orally a given selection during the pupil/ teacher conference after the former has completed reading a library book. Ample time was given during the conference to discuss with the pupil what had been comprehended from reading the library book.

During the middle to latter 1960's, The Initial Teaching Alphabet (ITA) had been introduced into the United States from Great Britain. The ITA was strong on stressing a one to one relationship between symbol and sound (see Howden, 1966). There are forty-four symbols in ITA with forty- four corresponding sounds, although this is debatable. Why? Both letters, the "c" and the "K", were symbols in ITA and yet they made exactly the same sound. The following letters were made the same and had the same sound as did the traditional way of writing each: b, c, d, f,

g, h, j, k, l, m, n, p, r, s, t, v, w, y, s, t, v, w, y, and z. Thus advocates of ITA stated that there were so many similarities between ITA and traditional writing of symbols that the transition for first grade pupils was relatively easy from the former (ITA) to the latter (traditional symbols). Long vowel symbols were made quite different by having the vowel to be emphasized hooked together with the "e" letter such as in the following: æ ee ie oe ue

There were additional differences in letters in ITA which made the transition from ITA to traditional symbols very difficult for many young readers. Pupils who transferred from an ITA to a traditional school found the transfer to be confusing. The expense involved in adopting a new reading program worked against the ITA; library books written in ITA were difficult to obtain and added further costs to this program of reading instruction. Substitute teachers generally could not teach reading with ITA symbols if the regular teacher was absent. A strong case could be made for ITA with its consistent sound/ symbol relationships, but too many mitigating factors culled out ITA.

I had a graduate student in my class in the early/middle 1960's who became an assistant superintendent of schools at Arnold, Missouri. He was a very strong supporter of ITA during the late 1960's. I even had a brochure from the Arnold, Missouri School System which advertised their innovative ITA program of reading instruction. ITA has not been used in the United States for at least fifteen to twenty years. The transfer problems from ITA to traditional symbols was too great for young readers. Then too, it was not practical for primary grade pupils to learn one alphabet and later switch to a different one for reading instruction. I have my graduate students learn facets of ITA merely for them to notice why pupils in the public schools have problems in learning to read. The English spelling of words reveals its inconsistencies. Even a commonly used word such as "his" is not spelled consistently since the "s" letter makes more of a "z" sound. One only has to notice that bad spellings of the following words in English to understand why reading is difficult for

many pupils: through, though, bough, rough, and cough. Each of these words ends in the letters "ough" and yet the pronunciation differs much from word to word when these symbols are encountered.

There are numerous programs of instruction using linguistic procedures in teaching reading. One approach that was advocated, also in the 1960's, stressed a patterns approach for pupils. Generally a word family was chosen around which a pattern of words could be discovered by pupils. The "can" family of words makes a good illustration. One of my cooperating teachers together with the student teacher I supervised stressed sentences such as the following: man can fan the tan van. Five words in this sentence follow a pattern with the "an" phonogram; one word "the" does not follow the pattern. It is difficult to write any meaningful sentence which has a consistent pattern of words. Pupils in the "can" sentence may notice words which pattern; for example, change the initial consonant "c" and a new word is in evidence such as in "fan."

A teacher does not need a basal to emphasize a linguistic approach in the teaching of reading. He/ she may take any word family which contains patterns and assist primary pupils in learning to read. I believe any system of reading instruction should emphasize pupils seeing patterns, either inductively or deductively. The issue becomes to what degree should this be stressed. I certainly do not advocate pupils using word families in developing sentences. A lack of meaningful reading might then be an end result. However, pupils can be guided to discover linguistic elements in words and sentences which assist a pupil to improve reading skills. Certainly, one approach in learning to read is using a patterns approach. There are many additional ways that pupils learn to read such as using context clues, predicting what will come next in the reading selection, whole language, phonics, and meaning theory in general.

Fries (1962) was a leading advocate of a patterns approach in teaching reading. The patterns approach did not emphasize phonics,

but rather it was advocated that pupils learned a structure of the English language in reading with patterns that pupils were to learn. These patterns then provided learners with a way of looking at reading and assisting each in noticing structures in the English language.

Many spelling texts for primary grade pupils emphasize learners becoming skillful in writing words which follow a pattern, such as in a word family: bun, fun, pun, sun.

Programmed reading was another interesting trend in the teaching of reading. There were teachers in my graduate classes who were using programmed reading. The Ottumwa, Iowa elementary schools, located sixty miles north of Kirksville, Missouri, and a city in which I supervised many student teachers used programmed reading from 1960- 1970. These readers emphasized pupils reading a small amount of content, responding to a completion or multiple response test item covering what had been read. After responding in their notebooks, pupils checked their answer with the correct one contained in the programmed reader. If the answer was correct, the learner was rewarded and went on to the next programmed item. If incorrect, the pupil now knew the correct answer and was also ready to go to the next sequential item in programmed reading. The same procedure was followed again and again with read, respond, check the response with the one given in the basal reader, continue with the next sequential item for reading. There was no variation in using these procedures in programmed reading instruction.

Programmed reading had numerous advantages for its use. The program moved forward in very same steps so that the learner made few or no mistakes in moving to the next sequential item in programmed reading. I believe good attitudes are developed as pupils succeed in reading instruction and yet move forward sequentially to more complex items to read and respond to. The success concept, I believe, was counterbalanced by the repetitious approach in teaching reading. The same procedure of read, respond to a completion test item covering content read, and check one's own response made for boredom. Then

too, meaningful reading was lacking since pupils read and responded to a segmented reading curriculum. Pupils had a difficult time reading for holism in ideas, themes, settings, plots, as well as other literary terms.

In Closing

From her research on the history of reading instruction, Carr (1995) writes about change in time as to what was emphasized in the teaching of reading. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Carr stated that pupils learned to read using the alphabet method. Thus saying the names of the letters was prevalent. During these centuries, the purpose of learning to read and write was to foster religion, morality, and patriotism. In the nineteenth century, a phonics method was stressed in that pupils said the sounds rather than the letters of the alphabet. In pre- radio and television days, oral reading to large audiences and within families was important entertainment. Phonics here was important due to the necessity of pronouncing each word clearly and correctly in oral reading to an audience. Carr emphasized that in the early twentieth century, the whole word method became important in teaching reading. Due to increased printed materials available, it was believed that whole word approaches assisted pupils to read more rapidly as compared to phonics methods of instruction. After World War Two, with the advancement of behavioral psychology and the measurement movement, phonics instruction increased in the teaching of reading. Carr writes that in the 1960's, holistic methods increased in emphasis; however, a back to basics in the 1980's, emphasized a behavioral psychology in teaching reading. A basics approach has always tended to stress phonics strongly in the reading curriculum. In the 1990's, Carr states that whole language has again become important in reading instruction in a literature based curriculum.

Unique plans of reading instruction, in many situations, come and go. This has been true of ITA, programmed reading, and linguistics emphasizing a patterns approach. Basal reading approaches remain relatively popular. There are many reasons for this such as the manual

section giving teachers some valuable ideas for teaching. Teachers do need assistance and guidance in using a specific reading program. Basals then contain suggestions for objectives, learning opportunities, and evaluation procedures.

Language experience charts remain popular in teaching primary grade pupils. Here, the experiences cone from pupils and are recorded by the teacher. The teacher assists pupils in reading the related content by pointing to words and phrases as both read the ideas orally. Pupils tend to recognize words as they read the content over several times. Since the ideas for the chart come from involved pupil's very own experiences, they understand and attach meaning to the inherent subject matter and are able to recognize the words more readily as compared to seeing the words in isolation.

Individualized reading will always be popular since children and adults read books on an individual basis. The individualized reading program has many strengths in that pupils select and read what is personally interesting. Just like the experience chart approach in teaching reading, the individualized reading approach is also holistic. Very little emphasis is placed upon an isolated program of phonics instruction in either program.

Whole language approaches are recommended presently in teaching reading. Phonics then is greatly minimized as a separate subject taught sequentially. Whole language approaches tend to advocate teaching reading to the class as a whole. Heterogeneous grouping is emphasized generally. Equity in educational opportunities is a major reason for stressing heterogeneous, not homogeneous grouping of pupils in the classroom.

There are numerous questions that continue to arise in reading instruction. These are the following:

1. should there be rational balance between whole language and phonics approaches in teaching reading, especially for primary grade pupils?

2. should adequate attention be paid to grouping pupils

homogeneously or should major attention be given to heterogeneous grouping of learners for teaching reading?

3. should cooperative learning be emphasized largely in teaching reading or should individualized approaches receive primary stress?

4. should an interdisciplinary or a separate subjects reading curriculum be in emphasis?

5. should state mandated objectives be advocated or should more of the objectives be determined locally?

Jervis and Mc Donald (1996) raise questions pertaining to the many state and national standards that are being advocated in the teaching of reading. They write the following pertaining to one child as an example, among others:

Meanwhile Cathy knows that, according to tests of reading achievement (the only assessment currently in most classrooms), Greg lags behind other second graders in reading skills. If Greg were judged in some global way by a written down external standard in reading, he would be one of those children who would never catch up. If he were asked to sit quietly at a desk for hours at a time in front of texts he was not ready to master, he might become a discipline problem rather than a master builder.

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